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**MARYLAND COUPLE SENTENCED FOR FORCED LABOR**

**GREENBELT, MARYLAND** – R. Alexander Acosta, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division, and Thomas M. DiBiagio, United States Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced that U.S. District Court Judge Alexander Williams sentenced Barbara Coleman-Blackwell, age 33, of Takoma Park, Maryland to 63 months incarceration and Kenneth Blackwell, age 37, her husband, also of Takoma Park, Maryland to three years supervised release with six months of electronic home monitoring, arising from their convictions under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000.

On June 9, 2003 after a three-week trial, a federal jury convicted Coleman-Blackwell of forced labor, document misconduct in furtherance of forced labor, conspiracy, and harboring an illegal alien for financial gain. Blackwell, who was not charged with forced labor or document misconduct, was convicted of conspiracy and harboring an illegal alien for financial gain.

The convictions arose from the forced servitude of Margaret Owusuwaah, a Ghanaian national. Coleman-Blackwell is the daughter of Grace Coleman, a Ghanaian member of Parliament and former Deputy Minister of Finance. Prosecutors believe that Grace Coleman sent Owusuwaah to the United States to provide domestic service and childcare for the Defendants, promising

Owusuwaah a salary. Trial evidence showed that from the time of her arrival in February 2000 until she escaped the Blackwells' home in July 2001, Owusuwaah was forced into around-the-clock service in the Blackwells' house. Owususaah was never paid for her services, and Coleman-Blackwell kept much of the payments earned by Owususaah from other families who hired her.

The Defendants compelled Owusuwaah's continued servitude through various means of coercion, including confiscating and hiding her passport and visa, not permitting her to leave the Blackwell home by herself, confining her to her work duties, and threatening that if she ever complained about pay or disobeyed she would be arrested, deported, and jailed.

Grace Coleman is also charged as a defendant in the case. The United States is presently seeking her extradition from Ghana.

"This conviction and sentencing is but one of the many cases that are part of the Justice Department's efforts to fight the moral scourges of human trafficking," said R. Alexander Acosta, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. "We will not tolerate such illegal servitude."

Since 2001, the Justice Department has greatly increased human trafficking prosecutions, opening over 200 investigations and prosecuting over 100 defendants, as compared with the approximately 80 investigations opened and 25 defendants charged during 1999-2000. In addition, the Civil Rights Division has provided extensive training to state and local law enforcement in trafficking investigation, has worked with source nations to bolster supply-side deterrence and enforcement efforts, and has launched a public awareness campaign to educate the public.

The case is the result of an investigation by the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, with assistance from the Baltimore Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Daphene R. McFerren and Trial Attorney Seth Rosenthal, from the Criminal Section of the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division.